

IMPROVEMENT ERA



Vol. 30

No. 2

DECEMBER, 1926

ORGAN OF THE PRIESTHOOD
QUORUMS, THE YOUNG MEN'S
MUTUAL IMPROVEMENT ASSOCIA-
TIONS AND THE SCHOOLS OF THE
CHURCH OF JESUS CHRIST OF
LATTER-DAY SAINTS ~~~~~

PUBLISHED MONTHLY BY THE
GENERAL BOARD Y.M.M.I.A
SALT LAKE CITY
UTAH

THE PETER WHITMER FARM

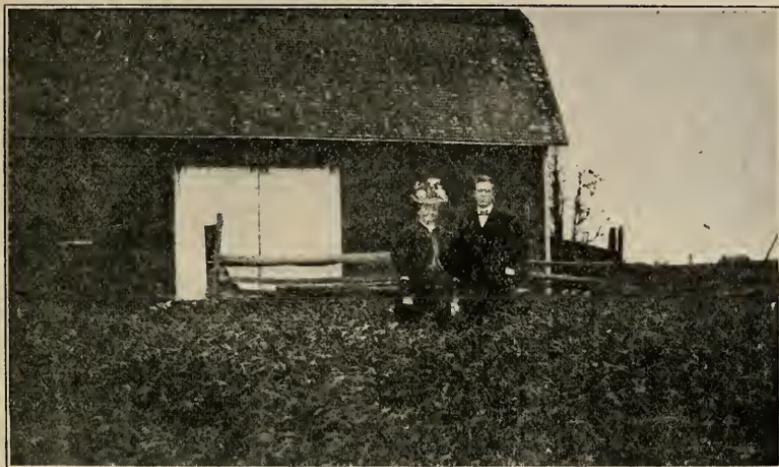
(See Frontispiece in this number of the Era)

In one of the meetings of the October conference, President Heber J. Grant announced that President Brigham H. Roberts, of the First Council of Seventy and of the Eastern States mission, had been "authorized to purchase, and had succeeded in purchasing, the Peter Whitmer farm, where the organization of the Church took place. The deal has been closed, and we are now the owners of the place where the Church was legally organized, April 6, 1830. The farm consists of about one hundred twenty acres of land."

President B. H. Roberts referred to the subject in his speech before the Saints, as follows:

I rejoice that the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is gradually gathering into its control the sacred places where great historical events happened. I am sure that it will tend to intensify our remembrance of those events. I remember the effect the general conference of the Eastern States mission had upon our young missionaries—the conference that was held at the Hill Cumorah in 1823, celebrating the one hundredth anniversary of the revealed existence of the Book of Mormon. I noticed the effect, on a group of missionaries only a few days ago, of a visit to the Memorial Cottage and the monument that mark the birthplace of our Prophet. It seemed to inspire them with confidence and faith in what they had heard of him. I rejoice that we have these places. I rejoice that we have the Joseph Smith Farm, the farm on which the prophet toiled in his boyhood, and where some of the important revelations of God were given to him. I never visit that place but what I feel that I am living in the atmosphere of the great events that took place there. The most uplifting, sanctifying and glorifying inspiration that I have ever experienced has been in the Sacred Grove, where the Lord appeared unto him who was to become the New Witness for God in the dispensation of the fulness of times. I am happy in the opportunity of visiting that place and of receiving the sacrament of the Lord's Supper there, from time to time. I rejoice that recently, acting under instructions from the First Presidency, we were able to secure the place where the Church was born, the house in which, as I now believe, the Church was organized. I know that that is disputed, and that a house is referred to about one hundred feet or more from the house that now stands, that was destroyed, and was said to be the old Whitmer farm and occupied by the prosperous Whitmer family during the time that the Prophet Joseph was a guest at their home, and in which he organized the Church. We now have a complete abstract of title with the name of every man and woman through whom the title

has passed; and I think we shall be able to patiently investigate the matter until we arrive at the absolute truth as to whether or not the house now standing there is the old Peter Whitmer Home. If that is not the house, we don't want to hold forth to the world that it is; but if it is really the home of the Whitmer family, where these revelations in section 20 of the Doctrine and Covenants were given at sundry times, and where the Church was organized—if really we have that house, what a treasure it is! And what an inspiration it will be to the Church to be conscious of the fact that we do possess it.



On the Peter Whitmer Farm, German E. Ellsworth and Mrs. George Albert Smith are standing on the spot which some believe to be the site of the old home; others believe the house now standing (see frontispiece) is the site of the old home.

It was to this home that the Prophet Joseph, his wife Emma and Oliver Cowdery, were brought by David Whitmer from Harmony, Pennsylvania, and were received as guests; and where the Prophet completed the translation of the Book of Mormon. As soon as it was completed, the prophet, by messenger, sent the glad word to his parents living at their home in Manchester township, and they with Martin Harris immediately repaired to the Whitmer home, where the prophet took the step necessary to obtain the testimony of the Three Witnesses. That testimony was received in a grove that then existed either on or near the Whitmer farm. They had prayer in the morning at the Whitmer home, for the Whitmer family were devout, Christian people. Old father Peter Whitmer was a member of that strictest of sects, the Presbyterians. He was a sincere and good Presbyterian and followed the practice of prayer at his family altar. The day after the arrival of the prophet's father and mother and Martin Harris, as they completed prayer that morning, the Prophet Joseph walked across the room, and speaking directly to Martin Harris, he said in effect: Martin Harris

you must repent. You must humble yourself before the Lord this day as you have never done before, and get a forgiveness of your sins; and if you will do this you shall, with Oliver Cowdery and David Whitmer, obtain a view of the plates from which the Book of Mormon is translated.

Shortly after breakfast the four named went out into the woods, as I have said, and there supplicated the Lord with the result that they beheld the plates and the engravings thereon, and they heard the voice of God proclaim that the translation was true, and he commanded them to bear witness of it to all the world.

In my interview with David Whitmer, in 1884, as he went over this ground, led by my questions, when we came to this part of it he said to me that in the progress of turning the leaves, or having them turned by Moroni, and looking upon the engravings, Moroni looked directly at him and said: "David, blessed is he that endureth to the end." When David Whitmer made that remark it seemed to me rather a peculiar thing that he should thus be singled out for such a remark, and I remember reporting it as such to President John Morgan, then president of the Southern States mission. I stated to him the peculiar feelings I had when I learned that from the lips of David Whitmer; but the subsequent history of these three witnesses led me to conclude that there was indeed a hidden warning in the words of the angel to David, "Blessed is he that endureth to the end." And it is rather a sad reflection that of these three witnesses he was the only one who died outside of membership in the Church. I wonder if Moroni was not trying to sound a warning to this stubborn man, that perhaps whatever his experiences and trials might be, that at the last he, too, might have been brought into the fold, and might have died within the pale of the Church.

Well, the foregoing mentioned incidents are the sacred associations connected with the Whitmer Farm in addition to the fact that it was the place where the Church of Jesus Christ was organized, and the First President of the Church sustained under the title of the first Elder of the Church, with Oliver Cowdery as the second Elder in the Church. I feel satisfied that we are going to get added inspiration from the fact that we own our birthplace and our cradle.

* * * * *

Bishop John Wells, speaking at the October conference on the subject of the purchase of the farm, stated:

"Some may say, 'Why purchase this property?' I am satisfied that the day will come when these historic places will be visited by tourists and Latter-day Saints in great numbers, who will stand in reverence in such hallowed spots. On this farm, and probably in the very house on it, the first sacrament was administered by the Prophet, and after those present had gone through the formalities of organizing the Church in accordance with the laws of the state of New York."

* * * * *

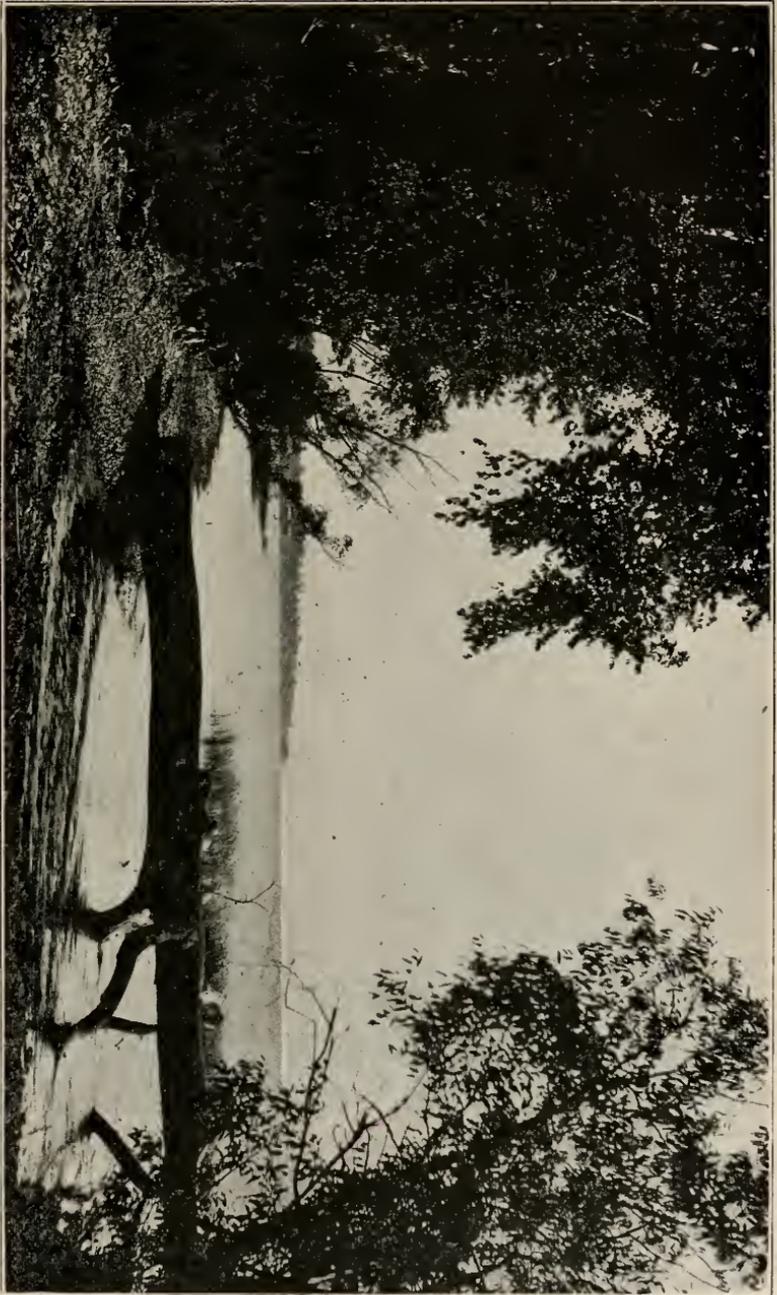


Photo by Geo. Ed. Anderson
Seneca Lake, New York, where Hyrum Smith and David and Peter Whitmer were baptized in June, 1829, by the Prophet Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery.

The Prophet Joseph Smith wrote concerning the Whitmers and others:

"We found the people of Seneca county in general friendly, and disposed to inquire into the truth of these strange matters which now began to be noised abroad. Many opened their houses to us, in order that we might have an opportunity of meeting with our friends for the purpose of instruction and explanation. We met with many from time to time who were willing to hear us, and who desired to find out the



The grave of Samuel Smith, near Topsfield, Massachusetts. Members of the Vermont monument party standing about.

truth as it is in Christ Jesus, and apparently willing to obey the gospel, when once fairly convinced and satisfied in their own minds; and in the same month of June (1829), my brother Hyrum Smith, David Whitmer and Peter Whitmer, Jun., were baptized in Seneca lake, the two former by myself, the latter by Oliver Cowdery. From this time forth many became believers, and some were baptized, whilst we con-

tinued to instruct and persuade as many as applied for information." (*History of the Church*, volume one, page 51. See also revelations in Doc. and Cov. Sections 14, 15, 16, given to David, John and Peter Whitmer through the Prophet Joseph Smith.) David became one of the Three Witnesses to the Book of Mormon.

* * * * *

It was announced, on October 26, that the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints had purchased a brick chapel in Seattle, Washington, for the use of its members in the Northwestern States mission. The chapel is built of brick and cost \$25,000 as purchase price. The structure had been inspected by Presiding Bishop Sylvester Q. Cannon some time previous during a trip he made to the Northwest, and on his recommendation the building was purchased. It will be a great advantage to the mission.

* * * * *

President Heber J. Grant, accompanied by Mrs. Grant, President John M. Knight, of the Western States mission, and Mrs. Knight, left Denver on the 25th of October for Big Horn, where they visited in that stake, holding a meeting at Lovell, Wyoming, on the 28th, and at Sheridan the following day. They returned to Denver on the 30th, and held meetings at Alamosa and Manassa, Colorado, in the San Luis stake, on Sunday, October 31, and then returned to Salt Lake City by election time for voting. President Grant went to Colorado the week previous to dedicate a chapel in Glenwood, near Denver.

December Days

Oh! give me a day in December,
 With its tang of frosty air;
 With its swirl of dancing snowflakes,
 Weaving a carpet rare.
 With its lazy, hazy mistiness,
 With its pealing, feeling crispness;
 Throwing a challenged dare.

Oh! give me a day in December,
 A day that is good to remember.

Oh! give me a day in December,
 With its crunch of frozen snow,
 And creak of belated wagon wheels,
 Winding homeward slow.
 With its stinging, clinging frostiness,
 With its glimmering, shimmering glossiness,
 Caught from the moonbeams' glow.

Oh! give me a day in December,
 A day that is good to remember.